

Life In The Vietnam Country Side

Slide One From the outset, this was planned as a simple uncomplicated short story of life in the Vietnam countryside, using the old adage, that a picture is worth a 1000 words. Using movie script and documentary techniques, that of explaining with dialog what isn't evident in the photos, to complete the story. That conclusion was aborted, when realizing there were slides available taken from rotary and fixed wing aircraft, providing aerial views of the terrain, giving a greater prospective to the story. What came to mind, was the aerials of the convoy travelling along a deep ravine along highway #14, between Kontum and Dak To, that added support to the story content and dialog. Working on reminiscence, plus guess work, much of the text was verified when checking two boxes of slides, containing maps and charts, include in this bananza of data were topographic maps, some are included. In short order, this easy quick narrative has voluminated into a complex major project.

A country's economics depends on a multiple of factors, not the least includes: climate, terrain, minerals, soil conditions, and transportation network. Straining the social/economic spectrum of the Vietnam's country side, was the fact the country was combating a prolonged guerilla warfare. Disrupting the transportation system, and many other aspects of the citizens life styles.

The country lies with the Tropic Of Cancer, making it consistently tropical in nature. This condition provided a back drop for plantations of coffee, tea, and rubber, when Vietnam was part of French Indo-China. A number of plantations were concentrated in the Saigon area. The day time temperature hovered in the upper 80's to low 90's, with the over night thermometer dipping into the mid to upper 70's. In the jungles temperatures were approximately 10 to 15 degrees warmer. In the Central Highland the temperature was about 10 degrees cooler in the day and a poncho liner or blanket needed at night. Along the coast, cool ocean breezes, prompted many servicemen to likewise use a cover at night. Vietnam had two seasons the hot and dry and dusty that ran from April to October; and the hot and wet or rainy season from October to March or April.

Conversation never centered on minerals in Vietnam. In 1967 there was scuttle-butt, that there might be off shore oil and gas, in the South China Sea, in Vietnam's territorial water. However, by 1971 nothing had transpired in that direction, resulting in a hoax for that rumor. There was no talk, nor did I see any mining activity in Vietnam, except for construction grade aggregate rock quarry operations. With this criteria, it's deemed Vietnam had no marketable minerals, or were inaccessible, because of the war situation.

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The topographic features of the Vietnam countryside varied immensely between the Northern DMZ, separating the two Vietnam's and the tip of the delta. I have been as far North as the Hue and Phu Bai area, and deep into the Southern delta, and witnessed the entire delta region from 14,000 feet in a Air Force fighter/bomber. The terrain deviated from swampy ground only inches to a few feet above sea level of the alluvial deposits in the delta, to the high plateau in the middle of the country, to inhospitable mountainous terrain in the Northern tier of the country.

Relying on my decaying memory, the Northern third of the country as map slide # 002 from the DMZ to below Da Nang, where Route #14 branches West, a distance of 100 miles, and from the Loasian Border to the South China Sea, hardly 50 miles was covered with mountains, running 2000 to 4000 feet high and deep valleys as terrain slides # 003-025. Many peaks surpassed the average elevation. West of Quang Tri City, near the village of Vol Mep, slide N/A one mountain top rose to 5581 feet above sea level. Within the relatively smooth terrain around the city of Da Nang, one peak South of the city stood at 4428 feet. The Da Nang map slide # 026 shows also, in the bay an island rose to 2214 feet high, and West of the city another mountain top stood at 4420 feet above sea level. Around the city of Hue, map slide # N/A, the terrain was mostly flat.

Good roads in the Northern section of Vietnam numbered three. The longest road in the country, Route #1 ran from the DMZ along the coastline of the South China Sea, for most of the country's length. In the extreme Northern tier, one road crossed the country from the sea coast village of Dong Ha into Loas. Below Da Nang, Route #14 intersected Route #1, heading West for Dak To and Kontum. Slide # 027, another improved road left the city of Hue, heading West toward Loas. These roads followed natural valleys.

With few roads and only pockets of flat terrain suitable for agriculture or towns and villages Slide # 028-03P the interior portion of the Northern third of the country was sparsely populated, inland from the sea. Montagnard Tribes people inhabited this region of the country. These mountain people lived off the land and were adapted for surviving off the land. Few Vietnamese villages were in the interior. The population mainly resided along the coast in towns, fishing villages (see slides of Cam Rahn Bay fishing village at this web-site) and larger towns like Hue and Vietnam's second largest city, Da Nang.

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The middle third of Vietnam, see slide maps # 031, sort of represented several massive steps. Along the Cambodian and Laos Border, are mountain ranges standing 2,000 to 4,000 feet above ground level (AGL) see slides 032-035 of the mountain border region. This area, like in the Northern Tier of the country housed Montagnard Tribes. (See Montagnard stories at this website.) These tribes were ideally suited with skills to survive in the mountainous terrain. The width of Vietnam had doubled in size to slightly over 100 miles wide as Slide # N/A depicts. The mountainous border was a back drop, giving way to a huge plateau, called the Central Highlands. See slides # 036-094. This plain had an average elevation of roughly 2,000 feet, and covered a North/South distance of close to 350 miles. Starting at Kontum in the North and extending Southward to around Da Lat. Nearing the South China Sea, the terrain radically dropped off to sea level, as slides # N/A show. In other regions in the middle third of the country, the mountains eroded, giving locales smooth fertile agricultural land and space for towns to develop as around Chu Lai area.

Spotty and interspersed throughout the entire middle third of Vietnam's Central Highland, were outcrops of mountain peaks on the plateau. Kontum and Northward to Dak To hosted numerous tall mountain peaks see Slide # 095. One peak East of the city rose to 6070 feet elevation. Another lofty one in the region stood at 5774 feet tall. North of Dak To slide # N/A shows one ridge rose to 6926 feet above sea level. Another one see slide # 096, the map states "REPORTED 10,500." South of Pleiku map # 097 one outcrop rose to 3373 feet high and another to 2546 feet stood Southwest of the city. Plei Me Slide # 098 had an outcrop standing to 2402 feet West of town and 2710 feet high South of town. Slides # N/A show the Central Highlands terrain. Bam Me Thout slide # 099 of a mountain top to 3635 and slides # N/A show terrain around Bam Me Thout.

In the Southern sector of the Central Highlands, sat the summer resort city of Da Lat, see Slide # 100. Da Lat rests at about the 4000 feet elevation. Close to the city mountain tops rose to 5925 South of the city, to 7096 feet North of town and a lofty peak climbed to 7603 Northeast of Da Lat. Besides summer villas, the town seated the Vietnamese Military Academy (See story at this website), and the U.S. Military purchased some produce (fruits and vegetables) see Slides # 101-102 of terrace farming and slide # 103 depicts cabbage growing in Da Lat area.

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Along the coastline in the mid-third of the country, from Chu Lai at the Northern end; to Tuy Hoa and Phan Thiet, in the Southern sector of the middle part of Vietnam, many portions of this stretch of land had several miles of level fertile land for farming and communities to form. However, in other areas more resistant, less eroded rocks, created outcrops of mountains on land, and islands in the sea.

West of Chu Lai slide 104 a hardy rock climber to 4760 feet, over the mostly level terrain. Slides# 105-106 show stream crossing, from creeks that began in the higher grounds, with hamlets or villages on the fertile ground, with ARVN (Vietnamese Military Forces) beginning a combat operation slides# 107.

The sea shore resort city of Nha Trang map slide# 108-X had a small area of a coastal plain that resembled a backward (?), with coastal mountain tops to 4449 feet high North of Nha Trang. An island in the bay, stood at 1509 feet tall (See this web-site of the De Long Pier Story for slides of Nha Trang Beach, also known as the Riviera of the Orient.) Slides# 109-122 show street and village life along the coastal area.

The port city of Qui Nhon, slide # 123 had one mountain standing 2831 feet high South of the town. Qui Nhon was in a bumpy location, with the only coastal plain North of the town. The entire region was encircled with rolling hills. The airport's runway length was restricted by the town and hills in a direct line of the runway, and the bay to the East. All planes approached the airport from the bay. Some planes like the C-123 often used (JETO) jet assistance for take-off. These were two jet engine pods attached to the outer wing. When cleared for take-off, the pilots would start these jet engines for only about one minute, injecting for a short period of time four engine power, for short field take-off. All planes veered to the right, to elude the hills once airborne. Slides# N/A shows one hill near the town.

The coastal towns of Phan Thiet Slide# 124. The highest ridge stood a mere 1247 feet high, North of town, with good coastal plain near the South China Sea for towns, Slides# 125-128 While Tuy Hoa, only the Northern side of town had a fertile plain. South of town an outcrop rose to 4449 feet elevation and one to 5331 feet high as map slide# 129 shows. Slides# 130-135 has life in the country side. Cam Ranh Bay map # 136

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The highway network in the middle third of the country was more comprehensive, but in reality the land mass also doubled and tripled in size. Useable hard surface roads linked major towns. With only a handful of East/West roads in over 300 miles meant many detours and out of the way travelling to arrive at most destinations. Highway #1 continued to follow the coast line South from Da Nang to Chu Lai, Phu Cat, Qui Nhon, Nha Trang, Tuy Hoa, Phan Rang and Phan Thiet as it moved toward Cam Ranh Bay.

Route #14 that headed West at Da Nang toward Dak To, then turned South on the Central Highlands to Kontum, Pleiku, and onward to Bam Me Thout, before heading West into Cambodia. From the port city of Qui Nhon Route #19 headed West to Pleiku before continuing West into Loas. Kontum had Route #104 headed in a South direction toward an undetermined location. Certainly a road left Nha Trang for the interior Central Highlands. Several major roads intersected Bam Me Thout. Da Lat had Routes #11 and #20 connecting that city. Route #20 headed South to Saigon.

The bottom third of the country slides# 137-139, the entire III and IV Corps area from South of Da Lat and Cam Ranh Bay area to the tip of the Vietnamese Delta, a distance of over 250 miles, the terrain became more predictable; it levelled out. The primary contributing factor was one of the world's premier rivers, the mighty Mekong River's alluvial fan and associated delta system, that emptied into the South China Sea. Slide 140 in the lower section of Vietnam. The volume of silt, soil, and other deposits carried by the river depended on the down hill velocity of the river. As the river's speed slowed nearing sea level, untold tons of silt precipitated out of the water, filling the river bed, causing the stream to find new avenues to find the ocean. This created islands all along the mouth of the river. Slides# 141-148A during the spring floods, deposited trace quantities of new soil, all over the Mekong River's flood plain.

South of Saigon, the elevation was measured in inches to a few feet above sea level. The Vinh Long map # 149 shows one site rises to 13 feet above sea level, and the Can Tho slide # 150 had one spot only 10 feet high. The water in the Saigon River and connecting canals oscillated with the tides. Slide# 151 of Tan Son Nhut depicts the same situation.. Marshy swampy delta region are shown in slides# 152-161.

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Anywhere North of Saigon, the elevation was measured in yards above sea level, affording farms, open fields, jungles, streams and communities to grow, from hamlets to cities. Slides# 162-208 show an assortment of life. Walking was easy, because everything was basically flat. Even from the air, it took a clear day to find divergents from the monotonous horizontal landscape. The pre-dominate feature close to Saigon was adjacent to Tay Ninh City, Standing 922 feet above the surrounding terrain slides# 209-213 Nuy Ba Dien comes to mind. The G.I.'s called it Black Virgin Mountain. This was a tremendous reference marker. On scores of flights, one could ascertain the direction of flight against this granite mountain.

The next feature were a series of rolling hills, seen on a clear day from the air, some 50 miles North of Saigon, War Zone "D" and the town of Phu Loi. These rolling hills extended North-east towards Da Lat, forming the embryo of the Central Highlands Slide # 214. East of Saigon, one hill rose half a mile to 2753 feet high. Slide# 215 shows the distance hill and jungle growth from the Saigon/Bien Hoa Highway, near Long Binh Post. The resort city of Vung Tau on the South China Sea, hosted several hills. The tallest stood 1109 feet tall Slide# 216.

The last departure from the mundane flatness in the bottom third of the country was outside Long Xuyen, 130 miles Southwest of Saigon. Slide# 217. There Nuy Sap ridge rose barely 200 feet over the rice paddies, though the map states 741 feet high. For 100 miles in all directions this pip-squeak of a hill contained the only rock and aggregate, suitable for construction projects. Both the Vietnamese slides# 218-236 and the Americans quarried Nuy Sap (see story at this website D102.5C10.) The Vietnamese worked the South side, while the Americans quarried the North face.

Many roads led to the capitol city. Route #1, that began at the DMZ, passed through Saigon, on its way to Tay Ninh and Cambodia. Route #20 from Da Lat VIA of Phu Loi and Bien Hoa stopped at Saigon. Route #13 also entered the city from the North. Route #15 went to Vung Tau. One main road Route #4 wandered all over the delta, serving Vinh Long, Soc Trang and Can Tho, on the North side of the Mekong River. At Can Tho a ferry crossing took buses and other vehicles across the river, where Route #4 continued to Vinh Loi and other destinations. Slides# 237-238 shows manmade canals and natural water ways, creating a watery transportation network for boats. (See Life on Rivers and Canals at this web site.)

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During the French Indo-China Era, a number of plantations were concentrated in and around the Saigon area. The Phu Loi map slide # 239 shows two plantations. A small one North of the town, and a larger one Northwest of Phu Loi. Slides # 240-241 East of Saigon, by the hamlet of Xuan Loo had a plantation. Both Michelin and Philhol Rubber Plantations were used by the Viet Cong. I filmed one combat operation in the Philhol Rubber Plantation (Caption material on file at this website.) Other plantations were centered in the Cu Chi area, West of Saigon. Slides # 242-247 depict some of these plantations against the jungle and some photos have Black Virgin Mountain in the background.

Electric power is another measure of a country's economic condition. I once heard a conversation, I think at MACV HQS. The two men in the hallway were debating percentages, that I had seen, but never considered in this prospective. The statistics being tossed around was about 1/4 to 1/3 of the population had access to electric power, encompassing 10-15 percent of the land mass. I had never considered the question before. But, having travelled all over Vietnam, and knowing the country side didn't have electric, while the cities did. Also, realizing most people lived in the cities, these numbers seemed plausible and in the realm of reasoning, but couldn't be confirmed.

Slides # 248-253 show high tension electrical power lines and local electric lines along the street on the outskirts of a town. Where electric power was available in the outline areas, it seemed that only businesses and commercial users enjoyed its benefits. Residential users were scant. The life style of many farmers were set in blood. Tradition was stronger than up dated trends. They went to bed at sundown and arose at daylight. Electric would disrupt and other wise invade their privacy. Many farmers living within the power grid, opted not to be connected. A simple light bulb, after dark would attract all sorts of attention, to include: the police, the VC and of course insects. Slides # 254-257 show no doors or windows on the hut, allowing for free flow of air ventilation throughout the home. For light after sundown, they used the cook stove flame. Many peasant farmers couldn't afford to feed themselves, much less take on the luxurious novelty of electric service.

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It was extremely difficult for the Vietnamese life style not to be impacted by the American presences. With 567,000 Armed Forces in country, civilian contractors, the largest was RMK/BRJ and thousands of field staffers working for the U.S. Embassy, including Air America's work force and CORDS. This afforded ample opportunity for tens of thousands of Vietnamese to obtain gainful employment. Regretably the voluminous job creation was in the vicinity of communities of significant size, not the country's heartland.

Talented and unskilled labor force were needed, to free the airmen, soldiers and seamen to perform the jobs for which they were trained. The military had two classes of workers, permanent and day labors. Many day laborers became full time employees. Despicable tasks as filling sand bags for bunkers, Slides 258-264 these people were paid two Paister per sand bag. With new units arriving daily and tattered sand bags needed replacing, the job was perpetual. Outhouse attendants were used to burn the human waste. Mess halls hired dish washers, servers and kitchen help, freeing the troops of (KP) kitchen police duty. Interpreters, drivers and scores of other vacant positions were filled by Vietnamese workers. The Vietnamese workers most G.I.'s were familiar with were the thousands of house, tent, hootch or hut girls.

Each house girl tended to about 10 troops, with as few as six and up to a dozen, depending on the unit's troop strength. Officers usually shared one house girl for every three or four officers. The duties the house girl performed were make the beds or bunks, dust, sweep and mop the floors, empty the trash, shine combat boots slides # 265-268, plus do the laundry of the troops she served. Many soldiers, opted to have their uniform laundered else where. They usually arrived for work about 8:30 A.M. and departed between 3:30 and 4P.M., creating a much shorter schedule than the 10 to 12 hour normal Vietnamese work day. As an independent contractor, each soldier paid the house girl for the services she performed. That ranged from as little as \$8.00 a month per troop, to roughly \$15.00 a month, providing the average house girl, with wages of \$110.00 to \$120.00 a month. Officers paid double and triple the prices for house girls, because each one served so few people.

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For Air America, the pilots and aircraft maintenance supervisors were about the only Americans. The aircraft crew chiefs, ground personnel and maintenance people were mostly Vietnamese. The only Air America flight, I ever took was hauling ammonia-nitrate explosives to Nuy Sap Quarry for RMK/BRJ.

(RMK/BRJ) Brown and Root, Morrison and Knudson, Raymond Int'l and Jones, the construction consortium hired by the Pentagon to build U.S. military bases in Vietnam, employed thousands of Vietnamese workers. In many instances, it was hard to find an American supervisor. For the De Long Pier (see story at this website) RMK/BRJ hired welders from all over Asia, to perform that precise and technical job. The causeway and other aspects of the project were constructed by Vietnamese workers. On any given day RMK/BRJ big rig gravel trucks would pass the DASPO or MACV Photo Teams on the highway, all the drivers were Vietnamese.

When RMK/BRJ repaved the main streets in Saigon, they did three lanes of traffic simultaneously, requiring hundreds of workers. With three lanes being re-surfaced at once encompassed over a mile of roadway, needing dozens of traffic control personnel on side streets, detouring and redirecting traffic around the work area. Dozens of asphalt truck drivers, street sweepers and oiling the street blocks ahead of the repaving operations, asphalt laying operators, rolling equipment teams, plus traffic control personnel at the constantly moving work site. I only saw a handful of American supervisors covering the entire project, all the workers were Vietnamese.

At Nuy Sap Quarry (see story at this web-site) for the dangerous job of operating a quarry, RMK/BRJ employed somewhere around 150 to 200 Vietnamese workers, with I think only seven Americans, one the cook. Asking the big boss, why so few Americans, the answer was astonishing! Stating we push the employee to find their breaking point. They accelerated the individual from paltry diminutive jobs to more challenging positions, until the person couldn't handle the job. They then settled the individual into the highest job the person could perform. That seemed to be RMK/BRJ's philosophy toward employees all over Vietnam, and fewer American supervisors needed.

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Much of the Vietnamese country side lived in a news vacuum with few newspapers, no electric for radio or television, or other modern mass communications, Living a frugal barely livable life without proper shelter, inadequacy of food, insufficiency of clothing and sanitation means. The only news that spread far and wide, was the National Lotta results. The national lottery was everywhere. For these people the only means of hearing about available jobs, was word of mouth. Then too, many Vietnamese were not only leary, but hesitant to work for foreigners. Access to transportation, eliminated untold thousands from seeking available positions. Leaving them to subsist the way they had for eons, without any outside subsidy.

For those who found jobs, there is no question the American presence in Vietnam had a monumental financial impact on the country's economic and revenue enhancement endeavors, allowing tens of thousands of Vietnam's citizens a regular paycheck, working for the U.S. in one form or another, and spending the money in the Vietnamese economy, bolstering the life style of all concerned. However employment opportunities was only one method the United States aided the residents of the Vietnamese country side.

American units conducted MEDCAPs, medical and dental aid to isolated hamlets and villages, affecting the life styles of hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese living in the country side. (See stories of Vietnamese and Montagnard MEDCAPs at this web site.) The 25th Inf. Div. alone treated 140,000 Vietnamese villagers in 19 months, according to their year book. They also completely relocated a village in the VC controlled Philhol Rubber Plantation, away from the enemy. The division constructed homes, built roads and schools for the village, at the new location. This was only one unit's civic action activities. All army commands had civil affairs units, to conduct MEDCAPs and other civil action project, to help the Vietnamese. All the army divisions had their respective schedules, tailored to the local needs and the unit's tactical combat neccessities. Other branches of the military, the Navy, Marines and Air Force, all contributed assets and trained personnel to civic affairs activities, that affected the life style of the Vietnamese people living in the country side

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The diversity of life in the Vietnamese villages, hamlets and country side, ran the gamut from homeless, destitute, insolvent refugees, living with friends or relatives, carrying with them a few possessions, they hastily gathered before escaping the conflict, war torn share-cropper old homestead Slides#269-273 show bomb or artillery craters near a hamlet in the back-ground. Slides#274-279 depict slum quality shacks and living conditions around the country. Contrasting other relatively affluent merchants, industrialists or entrepreneurial families, provided goods and services unique to the area. Slides#280-281 or more efficient at producing goods, than other local competition. Most of the people living outside the major cities continued to live and support their families as best they knew how. The knowledge and methods, handed down to them from generation to generation, with little outside intervention.

The Vietnam country side was approximately a century behind Western standards of living. This allowed many openings or avenues for increased productivity and innovations that could be construed as crude by our standards, but any initiatives or incentives that propelled output would manipulate profits many fold, for business, industrialist or farmers. Two examples come to mind.

MACV Army "A" Photo Team, filmed at two lumber mills in Vietnam. Slides#282-283 One saw mill was within the power grid. The mill using an electric saw was able to cut up an entire log into boards in roughly five minutes. While a short distance away, another saw mill, outside the electric service resorted to using two man hand saws. It took the two men nearly a half hour to cut one board from the log. These two businesses were at the extreme ends of merchandising, and are but one showcase of innovation, where one saw mill produced boards from at least 10 logs an hours, compared to two boards in equal time. The customer didn't care if the lumber was machine cut or hand cut they paid the same price, but the electric saw mill had a much higher profit margin.

The electric saw mill had about a five foot radial saw blade. A few handles stopped the blade and operated a cradle on which the log was fed onto the saw blade. The manual saw mill, one man stood atop of the log with the co-worker standing under the elevated log. There the two men sawed the log. Neither facility had planning and sanding equipment to smoothen the rough cut boards.

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The other story of drastically improved living conditions through innovation took place in the delta. One peasant rice farmer, planting floating rice for years struggled barely able to feed his own family, had his son enrolled in law school. This farmers transition happened because he was slingshot a century ahead to modern farming techniques of the 1960's, by using hybrid seed, fertilizer and crop diversification. This well document event (see this web-site for CORDS/JUSPAO Pubs-005 DTD 13 April 1968 D102.5C10). The MACV Army "A" Photo Team worked with these Civil Operations and Revolutionary Developments Support (CORDS) personnel. They told me about this extreme change in life style for this one farmer, and hundreds of of rags to riches stories that was happening in An Gaing Province with CORDS agricultural assistance. CORDS had teams working all over Vietnam on similiar projects, for the betterment of the common Vietnamese.

CORDS introduced a host of crops suited for the soil pH around Long Xuyen, including melons, soybeans, corn, onions, garlic, cabbage, cauliflower, cucumbers and sorghum as crops, and hybrid American pigs and chickens for animals. CORDS also introduced a new strain of rice (IR-8), requiring only 150 day growing season, allowing for two crops a year; that yeilded 10 times more rice, than the Indigo floating rice. The CORDS people told me, the world record for IR-8 was over 12 tons per hectare, but one An Gaing farmer was rewarded with a yeild of over 14 tons per hectare, for a new world record. Slides #284-291 are from JUSPAO Pubs oo5 CORDS also brought in 270 farm tractors, of which over 40 were in An Gaing Province.

For centuries the (Indigo) strain of floating rice was considered the only crop for the delta region of Vietnam. This tradition was passed down from grand-father to father to son. No one in the oriental culture ever questioned grand-father or fathers knowledge nor wisdom. The Indigo floating rice yeilded about 1500 kilos per hectare. (2,47 acres to a hectare and 2.2 pounds to a kilo.) In simple terms, the floating rice harvested about 1330 pounds or hardly 20 bushels of rice an acre. The floating rice produced a single crop of rice a year, requiring about 200 days to mature. The rest of the year, the rice fields sat idle. The farmer that had his son in college, planted less than an acre of soybeans in the inactive rice paddy. That generated enough income for tuition and other educational costs. The soybeans took only 100 days from planting to harvest.

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For eons the delta area had been the rice basket for the region of French Indo-China, producing an ample supply of this food staple, for the Vietnamese people to digest, and surplus for export to neighboring countries, providing hard cash to the war weaken economy. Since the mid 1960's, according to the CORDS people, through a travesty of events including the war, Vietnam had to resort to importation of rice merely to feed it's own people. CORDS hoped to reverse this situation, by having each peasant farmer have an abundant food for themselves, but also feed 10 other people, turning around the trend that was occurring.

Preparatory procedures of the rice paddy for planting was an integral part of the food production process slides# 292-295 For floating rice levelling the rice field with a water buffalo dragging a board sufficed. Farmers planting the hybrid IR-8 or IR-5 variety of rice necessitated machanical levelling of more sophistication. When this was accomplished, the farmer growing floating rice needed to only spread the seed on the flooded rice paddy. For IR-8 rice farmers, the sprouting plants needed transplanting 20 days later slides# 296-298. Over the next few months the rice grew, as the seasons changed and the rice paddies dried out slides# 299-303.

Once matured, workers, using a sickle slide 304 cut the rice stalks at ground level. Slides 305-309 show collected stacks of rice plants ready to mill the rice, separating the rice kernels from the hull or testa. This was done in two methods, slides 310-314 depict a circular area in the rice field. The stalks were layed out in the circle and a water buffalo or other farm animal walked around the circle cracking the hulls, from the rice seed kernel. People would then sweep up the mixture and sift the material separating the rice from the testa slide 315. The other method was a machine slides # 316-317 that discharged the rice from the stalk. The stalks were used as animal fodder and/or straw for thatching roofs.

Rice farming far exceeded all other agriculture forms and the largest single component in Vietnam's society. Only the combined Vietnamese armed forces, may have out numbered the rice farmers. Rice growing was a major crop seen in every level spot and planted in every nook and cranny of the country, not just the delta region.

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In one of Vietnam's 43 provinces, CORDS was making positive commercial impact, from farmers tapping our technical agriculture knowledge, for their financial gain into prosperity. The military hired thousands of Vietnamese workers, contractors and embassy employed thousands more, yet these huge numbers of Vietnamese working for the U.S., reflected a scant few percent of the total Vietnamese population. The country had an economy of its own, with a large portion of the people living in the country side, toiling the fields, planting the main staple of their diet (RICE.) A few other, enterprising people found ways to cater their talents to the military wants and desires, outside of regular employment credentials.

Slide # 318 shows some took in laundry. This enabled the woman to earn extra income, while not leaving the home. Other, I recall Ex-bar girls in collaboration set up a jeep and truck wash, slides # 319-322 across the Bien Hoa Highway, from the Long Binh Post main gate. Others, including the truck wash operation, knew the American preferred cold drinks, and would procure a block of ice and sell chilled cokes and beer to the American servicemen. These merchants did not pander nor out right molest the Americans, but simply notify, that they welcomed the American customers, or that they catered toward the American desires.

No servicemen that every spent time in Vietnam can forget the bars that catered to the American servicemen. You could hear them, before you saw the bar. Most played loud American music. Some even had a rarity, air conditioning. The bar girls dressed in sexy outfits to attract the G.I.'s. This was all a come-on for the main culprit SAIGON TEA. The bar girls got a percentage of every Saigon Tea, the G.I. bought them. Inflation took the price of a shot glass of actual tea from 150P to over 300P per glass between 1965 and 1971. As long as the servicemen bought the bar girl Saigon Tea, they would sit and talk with the G.I.

Many bar girls were destitute country girls seeking a better life. With little education, no career history, the only work available was, working as a bar girl. Most turned to prostitution working the bars. Certainly a few bar girls were enemy agents, who's main purpose of working the bars was intelligence gathering activities for the NVA and VC. It was seldom to hear of a G.I. marrying a Vietnamese woman, yet by wars end there were thousands of Asian/American children in Vietnam. SLIDE #322 A

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Another group of Vietnamese that catered to the Americans in a loathing aggressive pursuit to separate the G.I. from his money. They hounded, vexation and caused irritation amongst the troops, loitering outside the gates of many military bases, scores of vendors hounded, harrassed the Americans to buy their goods or services. As many as 40 to 50 people would linger at the gates, selling rides by taxi or pedicab into town. Pan-handlers attempted to sell fruit as, watermelons, oranges, bananas, and grapefruit; potentially injected with poisons by the VC. Others pestered the U.S. personnel to buy rings and watches. It looked stupid to see a man in 90 degree heat wearing a coat. Opening the coat he had dozens of rings and watches pinned to the coat lining. Most of the merchandise were stolen or other wise maliciously jinxed and doctored. He had Rollex watches for \$50.00, with Mickey Mouse Watch mechanism, that might work for two week, as one G.I. experienced. Other vendors had Lotta tickets to sell. Black market goods as chewing gum and cigarettes were prevalent, among vendors peddling their goods outside the military gates. These were some of the brazenly persistent hawkers the G.I.'s had to elude, evade to get off base.

If a convoy slowed or stopped slide# 323, along its route, hustiers somehow materialized, offering to sell to the troops, fruit, but mostly black market items. These Vietnamese peddlers had American cookies, comic books, Beenee Weenees, Vienna Sausages, tins of American potted meats. The one item welcomed by the troops, from the pestering, badgering vendors were sodas, which in the heat, and from April to October, during the dry season was a blessed relief from the dust. Most of the goods being hawked were repetitious at every stop. But, someone managed to introduce a new item or product line every now and then. Some of the Mamasan peddlers appeared to be wearing black lipstick.

This black lipstick look, in essence wasn't make-up or cosmetic enhancement at all. It was caused by Beetle Nut, a mild narcotic chewed or sucked on, by the poor, peasants and refugees. It was locally grown, and used mostly by middle aged women. I have witnessed men and young ladies, that had sucked the Beetle Nut, but, by far it was the mamasans that preferred this narcotic affect. In 1965, Beetle Nut useage was commonly seen throughout the country. However by 1971 Beetle Nut useage had deviously diminished to a trickle. *SLIDE # 323A*

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Whether this signified a lessening of stress, tension and family problems among the poor; the ability of the peasants to pay bills, put food on their table, along with an amalgamation of domestic troubles resolved, because of the country's economic boom, or if the user had a diversion to other readily available drugs, will never be known. It was however, a cheap way for the destitute people of Vietnam to get high.

Most homes were built close to some form of transportation system. Slides # 324-325 Either a road, canal or other waterway serviceable by boat; or other sensibility locale. Yet, I witnessed several huts that defied description. On one combat patrol, the unit, I was filming, came across a hut in the jungles of the Iron Triangle (VC controlled territory.) Slides #326-329 the land was not tilled, no roads for miles, that we had trekked through, no pathway or trail leading anywhere; yet a family lived in the jungle. They certainly were hermits, living in such an isolated and remote location. They definitely were VC sympathizers. How they survived is anyones guess? Maybe they poached wild game for food, or trapped and collected unusual and exotic wildlife as birds, reptiles and animals to sell in the city.

There were several menageries type operations in Saigon. I'd hate to call them pet shops. Most were as simple as a street vendor on a bicycle, with a monkey on his shoulders, a cockatoo or parrot tied by the feet to the handle-bars. Several cages of lizards or snakes. All had plastic bags, filled with water containing tropic fish, also tied to the handle-bars. Several cages of parakeets would round out this travelling collection for sale. So it was conceivable, the jungle family collected these exotic animals. The most weird mascot a unit had were sloths. One unit had a two toed sloth, another unit, I visited had a sloth bear. In Bam Me Thout Slide # 330 I saw wild elephants,

There were more stories than believable, about troops on combat mission encountering wild tigers. The jungles of War Zone "C & D", the Hobo Woods and the Central Highlands were the tigers habitat. A few stories might have merit, but most were facetious. Because the tiger's senses are too keen, their sight, ears and smell, would tell the tiger to avoid humans, not beckon a tiger against its natural instincts.

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The opulence and prosperity by western standards is usually visible by the abode and housing, where the owner resides. For the share-cropper, tenant farmer renting the land, there were pragmatic reasoning with no desire to improve the squatters hut they were living in, on someone else's property slides 331. Even if they could afford better housing there was no incentive to do so. CORDS stated, that a number of tenant farmers were hoping to purchase the land the farmers were renting; from the extra income earned from growing IR-8 or from other crop diversification knowledge they had learned.

The Vietnamese had one item used as building materials that's beyond imagination. It wasn't native to Vietnam nor even a construction product at all. In fact, it was advertising, and who would want to promote an American product that they never heard of on their home? The item in question were uncut metal sheets of 12oz. beer cans. First off, how did these three foot plus strips of four color printed sheets of American beer cans ever get to Vietnam. is a puzzlement, within itself. It wasn't that a single container was put on the wrong ship at some U.S. port either. They had multiple sheets from a number of American breweries as slide 332 illustrates.

Represented were Carling's Black Label, Falstaff and Pabst beer sheets, to remember a few. Plus this unique wall covering wasn't just a local spectacle, near port cities, but widely assimilated around the country, fueling the mystic as to why and how uncut sheets of American beer cans got to Vietnam in the first place. I can't phytom, Vietnam having a printing plant capable of producing four color print on metal. Coke and Pespi both had franchises in Vietnam, but it was only obscure regional American beers that became glorified external wallpaper.

Most building materials used in the construction of Vietnam's homes were readily available from domestic sources. Thatching for grass roofs as slide 333-334 depicts, came from stalks of rice plants. Bamboo, a native plant grew wild or could be transplanted as a home's adornment, providing shade or building materials. Bananas and palm grew profusively, giving the user cover roofing or side wall cover slide 335-336 shows. The jungles had ample trees for lumber and wooden accents on some homes. Sand and aggregate were plentiful for concrete. The only construction material in question was cement? I have no knowledge of a cement plant in Vietnam, but neighboring Asian countries could supply Vietnam with this critical building commodity. Not the least, the Philippines, thailand, if not Cambodia or Laos.

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The construction materials and products used to built homes in Vietnam, varied greatly, depending on the social and economic spectrum of the people. Land owners, merchants, plantation owners and others lived in grandeur. Having sturdy villas, several stories high Slides # 337-342. These homes were constructed of cement blocks and stucco, complete with glass windows, storm doors, having fences and gates for access to the property, and other gracious amenities, for comfortable living. One home that I flew over slide # 343 was luxuriant, having a built in the ground swimming pool, but this was the most affluent. Other Vietnamese of financial independents Slides # 344-345 had a new all metal storage shed for equipment and other stores.

For the poverty stricken peasant farmer, it was a challenge just to secure next years seed grain, slide # 346 from marauding mice, rats and other vermin pest. The farmers constructed a SAFE PLACE, made of adobe and mud to store the seed rice in a secure manner, until next spring planting. It was covered with simple rice plant thatched roofing material, held up by bamboo poles. This was the simplest construction, that did the job. In the Central Highlands Slides # 347 and elsewhere, mud brick or adobe was used as a home construction material.

The peasant's homes were basically four walls with a roof. It was a frugal existance for the family of poor folks. Contruction varied little, whether the materials were grass, wood, palm or banana leaves, wood or something else. They all seemed one room shacks. The peasant's home was well ventilated, without doors or glass windows, that would block the free flow of air throughout the hut; as previously seen in slides. The floor was earthen, with a fire pit in one corner for cooking, and also served as a source of light after sundown. They had no plumbing, meaning no running water, nor sewer system. I saw few, if any outhouses in the Vietnam's country side. The peasant's home may have had a wooden chair or two, but no beds. A straw mat on the dirt floor served as a bed. If the family was lucky, they might have had a hammock for the parents to sleep in. SLIDES # 348-358

A hot commodity on the Vietnamese shopping list, were American shipping pallets. They could dismantle the pallet for the boards, used in construction at no cost. The pallets were trash to the Americans, but a gold mine of free wood to the Vietnamese.

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Most Vietnamese were somewhere in between the distressed indigent poor, and yet, no where near the wealthy sector either. Most middle class homes Slides# 359-360 were secluded, behind fences and large trees, providing visual sightings of only the roof and fragments of the house itself. Whether, these middle class homes had doors, windows along with furnishing content, is open to speculation. Many were multi-structure complexes, having live stock shelters and other buildings.

As Slides # 361-363, for some reason, a number of homes were painted. Usually green or white. The white would reflect the sun thus cooling the home. Slides # 364-371 shows that some middle class homes had tile roofs. With few doors on the wooden middle class homes, one could get a glimpse inside. Rarely did the home exceed a 20X20 feet square. The homes seemed equally divided between earthen and wooden flooring. Furnishing were unseen as to sleeping arrangements and furniture. They appeared too small to be more than a single room, in many cases, for the entire family's life activities. Telephone and electric, were reserved for the most prominent of the middle class, if these services were available at all.

Fencing around the property was a status symbol and some what of a novelty. Some home owners wanted a little privacy and constructed fences, that ranged from being crude, a few sticks in the ground to mark the property boundary, to more elaborate wooden fences with gates.. Slides# 372-376 encircling the landscape Flowers as Slide # 377-C depicts, adorned the exterior of the property of a few homes. Some species of Bougainvillaea were native to the tropics and virtually grew wild, allowing the homeowner to capitalize on this phenomenon.

Grass was never grown for lawns. Several culminating reason for the lack of grass, not the least, grass would take up garden or vegetable patch space. Gardens were universal, all over Vietnam, by home owners of every social status. Planting tomatoes, beans, onions and carrots among other vegetables, supplemented the family diet with fresh produce, beyond rice alone. Slides # 378-383 the garden greatly reduced the purchases needed at the market and dependency of buying vegetables, because of the lack of refrigeration.

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Another reason for the lack of grass, were the livestock, the farm animals the middle class family owned. Slides # 384-390 the pigs, goats, ducks, geese, chickens, oxen and water buffalo, were commonly seen running loose on the property. The animals would trample or eat any grass, looking for grains of rice to eat or other forage available.

Vietnamese families set priorities that sometime forsaken the home and improvements to the house and the bicycle, for better, more reliable, faster mode of affordable transportation as slides # 391-394 illustrate, to take the family out, or get to work quicker than walking or pedalling a bike.

By western standards barter, trade and haggling over prices are outlandish, but for Southeast Asian countries, it was a way of life. One would never pay the initial quoted price and were expected to haggle over the price of goods or service desired. One rule of thumb, was to offer about 1/3 of the sellers initial price. Vietnamese would spend more time swapping prices than actually, buying what they needed. The Americans weren't use to this form of pricing merchandise, and truly were a failure at this technique, paying far more than the true value of the goods or services. I've had to haggle a few times, to get a taxi, especially late in the war, when cab drivers wanted 350P for an 80P ride from Tan Son Nhut to downtown Saigon. We settled on 200P

The best haggling that I incurred happened while sitting at The Continental Palace having a local rice beer (Balmi Bai), when this kid came up, wanting to sell me a copy of the 25th Inf Div. Year Book. I had done a lot of work with the unit, but never a member, thus I never wanted nor had a desire for the book. The kid wanted over 3000P for the book. I offered him 500P. The kid had stolen the books in the first place, so why should I pay for stolen, black market goods. He walked off insulted, but was soon back, dropping the price to 2500P. Staying firm at 500P, the kid stalked off, but soon returned asking 1800P. I eventually got the book, that I deemed worthless for my initial price. Years later, doing these stories for the Vietnam Archives, that useless, worthless book has been invaluable.

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All aspects of Vietnam's society bartered, traded and haggled for the best price. For a farmer, with excess chickens, he may swap several chickens for a piglet, through a copulation of haggling and barter to secure the deal. Later when the pig matured, if he had a boar, the farmer might haggle a deal to mate his boar with another farmer's sow, and split the piglet offspring among the two pig owners. By getting both sexes, the farmer could mate his own pigs, and supply meat for the table and/or barter and trade for other livestock. Seldom was money involved with these transactions. This barter, trading and haggling aided both farmer, helping increase each farmers own herds and diversify the meat available to eat.

A primary resistance to the Americans price haggling was the communication barrier. Whether it was converting English into one of several Vietnamese dialects, and/or attempting to cross communicate with any of the numerous Montagnard tribal languages ,into English, that completely eluded the Americans from being successful bargain hunters in Southeast Asia, is a point of interest

One of the first Montagnard cross-bows, I layed eyes on, a photographer had obtained in the Pleiku area, He was boasting of his treasure, and the deal he had gotten. Paying a price tag in the low teens. But, the one variation of haggling/non-haggling, that I saw and watched unfold, quite aptly crossed all language barriers, with hardly any verbal communication being spoken by either, the buyer or seller involved. It was ingeniously done, and a true learning lesson for all that witnessed the transaction

The civil affairs sergeant, that the MACV Army "A" Photo Team was filming, wanted a Montagnard cross-bow. When the bow marker arrived. The SGT reached into his pocket, extracting 300P (\$2.50 American.) I had expected the SGT to offer 500-600Paister. The NCO put the money in one hand and the cross bow in the other. Outstretching both arms, so that the Montagnard couldn't grab, both the money and cross bow and run. The last words spoken for over five minutes, the NCO asked the Montagnard, if he wanted the money or the bow.

The NCO turned his head to the arm holding the money and wiggled his hand. Reversing he did the same to the hand holding the cross-bow. The Montagnard several times reached for each hand, but stopped. This non-verbal price bickering continued. In final desperation, the Montagnard took the money. The resolve and conviction of the NCO paid off; paying only 1/5 what the photographer had paid for an identical item.

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Both NCO's were cognizant of the one-third the initial offering rate, rule of thumb. The difference, was that I didn;t want or need the year book, and offered a price so low, I never expected the offer to be acceptable. The SGT, with the cross-bow, wanted the item, and was probably testing the absolute bargaining limit.

Another social entity that factors into a country, is its religion. I once read a report, that was probably published in one of several orientation booklets for new troops arriving in Vietnam (that are on file at this web-site), stating the Buddhist religion comprised close to 85% of the population. Around 10% were Catholic faith and the remaining five percent were mostly Confucians religion and other religious groups.

The entire Southeast Asia is a hub of Buddhist and was expected to be the dominate religion of Vietnam. With thousands of people of Chinese ancestry, living in Vietnam, one would expect that Confuchanism would rank second, but that wasn't the case. The French brought with them the Catholic Religion, during the French Indo-China Era. Even tho the French were kicked out of Vietnam in 1954, the church survived. It seemed the only religious group, during the bedlam, choas and horrifing bloodshed of TET, to provide any help to the refugees, through its Catholic Charties. The other religious group, had no plan of action and seemed to wallow in the nightmare, unable to provide any form of help.

The circumstances surround the disappearance of Buddhist Monks from the streets, was a mystifying experience, without any knowledge as to why the occurrence took place. It was so gradual one never noticed the evaporation, the swindling, the fading from sight of the Buddhist Monks from the streets of any city. In the fall of 1965, monks were seen prolificly. Every few blocks monks were seen as singles or in small groups. Seen were younger monks wearing bright yellow robes. Older more senior monks were dressed in orange robes. By chance, occassionally seen were elder grand monks wearing lavender or purple robes.

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By 1967, the grand monks and senior monks had all but disappeared from view. Days went by without sighting of even a junior yellow robed monk, outside of the temple. By 1969 and 1971, the sighting of a monk a month was an oddity. It wasn't that the monks wore civilian attire, because of their nearly shaved heads were as distinctive as the wearing of the robes themselves. What happened to the monks is a mystery? I pondered if they had gotten cars to drive around town? Or if they only came out after dark or what?

The Buddhist Religion had a real dissimilarity amongst the various branches in Southeast Asia. For the western outsider, it was a strange contrast to hear the term "SECT". One sect did this, another sect did that, still another sect had its own Army etc. It was disheartening, to learn of the discontinuity within one religious group. However it was no different than any other religion. The Christian Religion is probably the most splintered religion on earth. The Catholic Church has the Greek Orthodox and the Roman Catholic versions. Then comes the question, are you Catholic or protestant? The Protestant side having score of dominations such as Baptist, Methodist or Lutheran, to name a few, yet all are Christians.

Within Southeast Asia, there was a stricking constrast in the Buddhist Temples. Slides# 397-399, any one of these buildings could house a Vietnamese Buddhist Temple. The temples were hidden a recluse, non-descriptive structure to the non-faithful, in locations unidentified to most non-Buddhist. I watched as Buddhist Monks entered a metal gate of a Saigon Temple. If I hadn't seen the monks enter, one would never know a temple was there. I saw no building over the gate. I pondered, the possibility of a covered Budda shrine, with outdoor religious services. In Vietnam I truely never saw a structure, that was built as a house of worship, like the Saigon Catholic Church. (Slides are on file at this web-site.) In a phone conversation with an EX-DASPO member, he stated, that he was caught in a fire-fight, in a recognizable Buddhist Temple, in Hue.

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Contrastingly, in neighboring Thailand; Bangkok had many stately and majestic Buddhist Temples, Slide #400-401 that dotted the city. The Buddhist Temples could be seen blocks away, with no mistake as to what they were. For an admission fee, the Thai Buddhist Temples were among Bangkok's premier tourist attractions. This was a stark deviation from the Vietnam Buddhist philosophy of undetectable places of worship.

The only Buddhist Temple grounds MACV Army "A" Photo Team ever entered was in Pleiku. The team leader set up the filming. All we saw, were yellow and orange robed monks burning long incense coils (Slides are on file at this web-site.) We were not invited into the inner-sanctum, to see their Budds shrine, at this temple. Nor where the monks studied, the kitchen, or sleeping areas, or any sacred interior sections of the temple.

Another element of religious origin, that was a sacred omen in Vietnam, was the backward swastika. Many of the swastikas, that I saw were made of cement. At first, I figured they were relics of WWII, since this region had been under axis power control. Later I saw some swastikas during Buddhist funerals. Unbeknownst to me at the time, but in the ensuing years, I heard that the swastika, had been used by civilizations down through the ages as a religious symbol; and not a new invention of the German Nazis.

Vietnam had classes of cigarettes, priced to fit the budget of every financial situation. They ranged from Class "A" to Class "D" cigarettes. There was nothing fancy, one size the 70mm length. They had no filters, no , no menthol, no lights or ultra-lights. What distinguished the classes was the tobacco. In the U.S. we sell only Class "A" tobacco products, which is a term for leaves only. In Vietnam, they used other parts of the plant as well. By the time, one smoked Class "D" brand, they had ground up the entire plant, using roots, stems, stalks as well as leaves. The prices ranged from near a dollar per pack for Class "A", down to about 15 cents for Class "D" brand. One time, I bought a pack of the Class "D" stuff, I don't recall finishing the pack, they were gross.

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Speaking of gross; Vietnam being in the tropics had its share of bugs, insects and a wide assortment of critters, besides the leaches, as described in (DASPO Covers 1st Inf Div at this web-site.) The country had one species of red ant, that somewhat had characteristics of the American Fire Ant. It lived in clusters, that hung to leaves and twigs of over-hanging plants. When the G.I. disturbed the plant, the clump of red ants with beady black eyes, would drop onto the soldier, immediately biting any exposed flesh. Medics had to treat the bites, if the medic himself wasn't bitten by the ants. On occasion, the bitten troop was MED-EVACed to a hospital for treatment. The ants were a real menace for our troops.

Vietnam had a dreaded, venomous foot long centipede. I had heard about these lethal creepy-crawly critters, during my 1965 trip to Vietnam, but hadn't seen any. A year later at the DASPO villa, someone found some centipedes in the back yard. Not knowing if these six inch centipedes were immature giants, or a different non-venomous species, didn't matter, we just wanted them dead. The king size version, with fangs, were a deadly force in their own right. Especially for troops on combat patrol, laying on the ground, these centipedes bite unsuspecting troops with poison fangs, requiring hospitalization.

Another bug, that brings back memories was a near sighted nocturnal flying critter, that was about three inches in length. It came out after dark and flew low, only about six feet off the ground. Just the right height to hit a tall American soldier in the forehead, but too high to hit shorter Vietnamese. They only flew about 20 miles an hour, but the affect was the same as being hit with a coke bottle. I've seen troops get knocked off balance, when hit by these armored plated night flyers. The dazed bug would drop to the ground for a few minutes then fly off, until it hit some other obstacale.

The last critter was nearly mythical in nature. I heard about them for three years, before experiencing them in person. The G.I. are known for tall-tales of unbelievable proportion, yet it was true. The critter in question was a member of the Gecko lizard family, which ate bugs. Having no knowledge, that the six inch lizard was capable of making any sound, I watched them crossing the ceiling of a hotel room, as several scarfed down dinner, until I heard a squeaky F--K you, from a part of the room, no person was located. The (F) word came from the lizard, and as close to a human voice as an animal could get, without vocal training.

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If talking lizards, that aren't an insurance commercial, is bazaar, more area animal news was presented, when PBS recently reported that scientists working in the tri-country old war zone region, had discovered five new animal species, within the past 12 months. That was down from nine new species uncovered in 2002. With new exotic animals being found in the region every 45 to 75 days, what exciting or morbid discoveries will the scientist find

Life in the Vietnam country side was simple, primitive and most definitely antiquated for the times. It needed a major technology revival, to usher in the 20th century, to this backward section of the world. RMK/BRJ introduced skills and insured managerial construction people, with qualified workers, to rebuild the dilapidated or non-existence infrastructure. Providing utility service to all parts of the country, not just the towns. Rebuilding the tattered over-incumbered roads and highway system. Up grade bridges from decades of neglect. Reconstruction slide 402 of the railroad system, so it could again operate, were but a few projects needed in the country side.

The military instituted, the first massive public health care program for the country, through the MED-CAP project. Giving disadvantaged and isolated villages and hamlets, the most comprehensive medical care ever. Thousands of Vietnamese were evacuated back to American hospitals for treatment. (see DASPO Escorts Viet Boy Home at this web-site.) CORDS inspired the farmers to grow more than a single crop a year. Introduced new rice varieties, that yielded far more rice, and instilled crop diversification program, in an effort for the country to feed its own people.

The cities had their share of problems too, suffering from dis-repair, outmoded, outdated systems of machinery and equipment. The French phone system, was post World War II vintage equipment, hardly able to expand or accomodate, the 1960's digital phones and microwave technology in service, without major modification or jury-rigging, or carry computer communication on the analog equipment in use. The decades old water and sewer system, constructed of terra-cotta material, erupted with leaks daily. The government penniless to modernize, repaired some leaks. The power plants were over taxed, with increased demand by all seven allied militaries. The electric generating plants were of the same vintage, if not antecedent to the phones. Adding to the burden were the zealous, voracious appetite for consumer electronics by the Vietnamese, with no increase in capacity, creating brown and black outs frequently. All these problems needed to be addressed, but most of all, they needed a cessation of hostilities.

William Foulke

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DASPO/MACV Photo Team

Written Nov 2004-Jan 2005